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Value transformations of Ukrainian student youth in the educational space

Przemiany wartości ukraińskich uczniów w przestrzeni edukacyjnej

ABSTRAKT

System wartości człowieka jest stosunkowo stabilny, ale pewne wydarzenia i warunki społeczne mogą na niego wpływać. W kontekście usług edukacyjnych, szczególnie istotne wydaje się badanie zmian w świadomości wartości młodzieży, gdyż to oni są w większości konsumentami usług edukacyjnych. Dzięki takim działaniom łatwiej zrozumieć dążenia młodzieży, jej oczekiwania i potrzeby związane z wyższym wykształceniem. Pandemia i wojna stały się znaczącymi czynnikami, które wpłynęły między innymi na praktyki edukacyjne współczesnej młodzieży, a co za tym idzie mogły mieć wpływ na jej system wartości. W niniejszym artykule poddano analizie jeden z elementów systemu wartości, a mianowicie konstrukt indywidualizacji, który eksplorowano, w ramach badania pilotażowego, w szerszym kontekście edukacji uniwersyteckiej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: studenci, samoświadomość, przemiany wartości, wartości wychowawcze, indywidualizacja

Considering that nowadays Ukrainians are facing the challenges of not only a pandemic but more importantly war, there is a need to identify what changes their system of values may undergo. The study of youth in this context is especially relevant, because the level of awareness among the youth, the one concerning values, in particular, is one of the most changeable and at risk.

One of the transformational processes regarding the system of values that are typical for modern Ukrainians concerns individualization. By individualization we mean the characteristic features of the individual, which are manifested in his/her desire to be independent in regard to decision-making, acquiring a certain level of autonomy and responsibility for his or her own life².

¹ Data złożenia tekstu do Redakcji „MiS”: 22.11.2022 r.; data zatwierdzenia tekstu do druku: 02.12.2022 r.

² Z. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, Wiley 2001.

Over the years of Ukraine's independence, the proportion of people with varying degrees of value shift towards individualization has almost doubled (7% in 1996 and 13% in 2020 p.)³. Although such people remain in the minority, we can assume that this trend is likely to continue. That is why the purpose of this article is to determine the current trends and prospects for the transformation of the system of values of Ukrainian students in the educational space.

Our previous studies have shown that in general, modern Ukrainian students show a stronger preference towards individualistic values (such as self-realization, independence, personal calmness, freedom, etc.) than towards collectivistic values (good relations with others, the ability to benefit people, participation in public life, etc.)⁴. But, turning to the search for manifestations of individualization in certain spheres of life, we concluded that modern students are more likely to be characterized by rationality. That is, in different situations they resort to both individualization and collective activities, focusing on how profitable their actions can be in a particular case.

The analysis of reproductive attitudes and family values of Ukrainian students allowed us to formulate a hypothesis that nowadays a transition to a mixed (traditionalistic-modernistic-postmodernistic) model of family values, which consists of both, the orientation to certain traditional values and postmaterialistic values, can be observed. For example, the majority of students, while striving to create a family and have children, also support the procedure of concluding a marriage contract to protect individual interests in case of a divorce⁵. In addition, the very fact that students admit the possibility of divorce indicates the individualization of their value awareness even at a deeper level.

While studying a sphere of life such as education, it is important to distinguish between the value of education and educational value. The former has a place in the general hierarchy of human values, and the latter is realized within the educational space. Educational space is a type of space that encompasses a person and the environment in the process of their interaction, which results in the growth of the individual culture.

The Bologna Declaration proclaims quality, fair assessment, relevance, mobility and competitiveness/attractiveness as the main values of European education⁶. We offer another typology of educational values, which will help to study this issue in

³ The conclusion was made using data from the World Values Survey: Wave 3 (1995-1998) and Wave 7 (2017-2021).

⁴ Bieliaieva V. (2020) Individualization as a new dimension of value orientations – *Sociology in (post)modernity. Compilation of abstracts of the participants of the XVIII International Scientific Conference of Students, PhD students, postgraduate students and young scientists*. Kh.: KhNU imeni V.N. Karazina, 2020. C. 30-32 [in Ukrainian].

⁵ Bieliaieva V. (2021) Individualization of family values of modern student youth (case of Ukraine) – Transformation of social institutes in information society : compilation of abstracts of the participants of the IV Congress of Sociological association of Ukraine, Kharkiv. Kh.: V.N. Karazin KhNU. 2021. P. 271-272 [in Ukrainian].

⁶ G.Haug, C. Tauch, *Summary and Conclusion. Towards the European Higher Education Area: Survey of Main Reforms from Bologna to Prague*, 2001.

the context that interests us. In particular, we proceed from the fact that values are expressed in practices, and therefore we distinguish the following educational values⁷:

- relevance of the acquired knowledge and skills;
- obtaining a diploma in higher education;
- improvement of your social status;
- the possibility of moving to another city;
- finding friends / like-minded people;
- the possibility of creating a career in the field of science;
- filling your time with certain activities;
- expanding the circle of useful acquaintances;
- involvement in the group;
- the practice of public speaking;
- receiving a scholarship;
- International academic mobility;
- the opportunity to do something useful for others through student self-government;
- influence on the educational process through student self-government;
- free attendance of sections/circles (sports, creative, etc.);
- free informal education;
- free access to various educational and research resources.

In the context of studying educational values, we in particular pay attention to how important it is for students to engage in certain practices related to the educational process, individually or collectively. This partly helps us to find out what is more valuable for students within the educational space: the process of cognition or communication. Although the concept of individualization implies an orientation towards the independent achievement of goals, we can assume that studenthood is a period when people often resort to collective practices, because such an action greatly facilitates the process of learning, and in some cases makes it more effective. For example, if students prepare for the exam session together, it can have a positive result. However, if students copy each other's homework, it may indicate the prevalence of the value of communication over the acquisition of quality knowledge.

In general, we can assume that the tendency of individualization is expected to have insignificant manifestations in the educational values of modern students as usually they have quite close ties with each other and resort to collective practices; perhaps not so much because it is considered to be valuable, but rather because it can be beneficial to some extent. During their studying at university, young people are faced with many tasks that are easier to do collectively in order to achieve better results. But this does not mean that outside the educational space, they will also listen to each other when

⁷ In this article we consider only studying at the university as an element of educational space and are studying the values that are realized in these spatial and temporal limits.

solving personal problems and will not choose to cope with difficulties on their own.

Based on all the above, we decided to conduct a quantitative pilot study among students of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University in order to identify their educational values. We measured them by assessing the importance of the opportunities that university education, which is considered to be a holistic process, provides to students. Thus, we used a 4-point ordinal scale (from “not important at all” to “very important”) to assess the importance of a particular option from the list. Additionally, we identified collectivistic and individualistic educational values with the help of projective questions with a nominal scale of proposed answers being provided for the respondents.

The pilot study titled “Educational values of modern student youth” was conducted from 10.12.2021 to 17.12.2021 and 77 respondents decided to take part. According to the survey, 76 respondents were students of higher education, among which 71 studied full-time, 4 –part-time, and 1 was on academic leave. By gender, we had the following distribution: men – 16 students; women – 59 students; refused to answer – 1 student.

Students from 10 faculties took part in the survey. The distribution by faculties is as follows: Sociology – 54, Foreign Languages – 6, International Economic Relations and Tourist Business – 5, Philosophy – 4, Computer Science – 2, Medicine – 1, Biology – 1, Economics – 1, Law – 1, Philology – 1. The study was conducted by using an online survey method with the help of the Google Forms platform.

Let us turn to our main hypothesis, which is that modern students are to some extent characterized by individualization of educational values.

To the question “With whom do you mostly do your homework?” the majority of respondents (71/76) answered “alone”, which is a kind of manifestation of individualization (although a significant number of respondents (27) live in dormitories and could do homework collectively to save time, for example). However, in case of difficulties during performing homework, higher education students more often turn to other students for help (41 answers), which is in line with our hypothesis related to the fact that in the students’ environment, the individualization of the value awareness of young people will probably not have significant manifestations due to group cohesion and the rational behaviour of students.

Here is the hierarchy of educational values of respondents (table 1).

Table 1. Educational values of the students

Educational values	The number of responses			
	„very important”		„very important” + „rather important”	
	n ⁸	R ⁹	n	R
relevance of the acquired knowledge and skills	56	1	68	1
obtaining a diploma of higher education	32	2	61	2
the possibility of moving to another city	17	7	38	7
finding friends / like-minded people	31	3	58	3
the possibility of creating a career in the field of science	13	9	27	11
filling your time with certain activities	19	6	44	5
involvement in the group	20	5	45	4
receiving a scholarship	22	4	41	6
international academic mobility	17	7	36	9
participation in student self-government	12	10	24	12
free attendance of different activities (sports, creative, etc.)	14	8	31	10
free attendance of webinars, training, etc.	14	8	37	8

We can see that by paying attention only to the answers in which the respondents marked the “very important” category, we can highlight such values as “relevance of the acquired knowledge and skills”, “obtaining a diploma of higher education”, “finding friends / like-minded people”, “receiving a scholarship” and “involvement in the group” as the most important. Among them, there are both individualistic and collectivistic values. The first ones are somewhat predominant, but we also note the significant importance of the second ones. Again, we explain this by the peculiarities of studenthood as a period of a person’s life. In particular, it is the time when people find friends with whom they can be close for the rest of their lives, so they often seek to find them.

⁸ Number of respondents who chose a certain option.

⁹ Ranking position of a certain option.

If we look at the hierarchy of educational values formed by adding the answers “very important” and “rather important”, we can even notice some collectivization (because some collectivistic values become more important than individualistic ones). This gives us grounds to formulate a new hypothesis, which is that individualization and collectivization are not interchangeable and polar trends in the value transformations characteristic of modern Ukrainian students. This directs us to the concept of the value field of the personality of L. Sokuryanska¹⁰, which is based, in fact, on the study of the peculiarities of value preferences of student youth. Her idea is that students are characterized by value ambivalence, and even opposite values coexist quite harmoniously in their minds.

The answer to the projective question “Imagine a situation where you need to make an important decision on education. To which ONE person will you turn?” gives us grounds to talk about certain manifestations of individualization of students’ value consciousness. Thus, the most popular answer was “to someone who, in my opinion, knows about this matter” (34/76). This indicates a certain rationality of students, and not their dependence on the opinion of the closest environment, which is inherent in the collectivistic value consciousness. However, the second most popular answer is “to a family member” (26/76), which still does not give us grounds to be confident about the tendency of individualization. Although the option “to the closest friend” was chosen by only 2 respondents, which is evidence that students are not ready to rely on friends when making important decisions, and this is a manifestation of individualization. So it would be especially interesting to see the answers to this question if we worked with a larger sample.

The survey showed that 59/76 respondents do not participate in the activities of student self-government. This is a manifestation of individualization because we can say that individual interests prevail over collective ones. The desire to find friends does not indicate a desire to cooperate with people. And participation in student self-government implies working in a team, which, as we have seen, does not attract most respondents.

Of those students (n-75) who attend classes (with different frequencies), 59 most often spend time between them together with other students. When classes are online, students prefer to spend time between them alone (59/75). Such data gives us reason to believe that this is one of the manifestations of individualization. We can assume that when students are in the same physical space, it is somewhat more difficult for them to detach themselves and spend time together with other students (besides, we did not ask about their level of involvement in joint activities or conversations during breaks). But when they have the opportunity to be alone (which is realized during online studies), they often choose this option rather than communicate with other students using gadgets. This shows that communication and involvement in the group are not considered to be valuable for students.

¹⁰ Sokuryanska L. Students on the path to a new society: the values of transition. Kharkiv: V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, 2006. P. 526-545.

Thus, the main hypothesis of the pilot study is that modern students are characterized by a harmonious combination of individualistic and collectivistic educational values. However, certain facts about the prevalence of individualistic values were also identified.

In addition, it can be assumed that the virtualization of life, and distance learning, caused by the pandemic, contribute to the individualization of the practices of modern Ukrainian students, which may affect their value awareness. But in general, students are again characterized by rationality, because they resort to collective practices in those situations where they can benefit from it.

Nowadays Ukrainian students are forced to carry out educational activities in the conditions of war. This is a problem that is almost impossible to solve individually. Therefore, people unite in order to survive. Volunteer initiatives, in which young people are actively involved, are powerful. But we cannot talk about the predominance of collectivistic values in the minds of Ukrainians, and in particular, among young people. It is rather a resort to collective practices motivated by the desire to preserve life and the values of independence and freedom. Orientations towards self-realization, material well-being, etc. can be more successfully realized in peace, so people, by uniting, try to bring them closer. This does not mean that after the victory, Ukrainians, and in particular young people, will no longer be oriented towards the values that were inherent in them before.

Interesting in this context are the results of a study conducted by the Sociological Group "Rating" at the beginning of the full-scale invasion (19.03.22). Even then, Ukrainian youth (18-35 years old), answering the question about plans after the war, first of all, chose the option "to get additional education or new knowledge" (71%)¹¹. That is, the value of education should increase. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that during this period young people realized that material goods can be easily lost, but knowledge and skills remain with a person, and he/she can apply them under any conditions, so the cultural capital of a person should be as diverse as possible.

Summing up, we can emphasize two main hypotheses. The first is that education today is becoming an increasingly individualized process under the influence of the general digitalization of society and the pandemic, which has led to even more active use of technology for studying. Thus, the value consciousness of today's youth is becoming increasingly individualized even though students still resort to collective practices during their studies. But the peculiarity is that students cooperate with others not because they consider it valuable, but because it is beneficial to achieve certain goals. Thus, modern students are characterized by rationality and in their actions, they focus on achieving individual goals rather than collective ones.

¹¹ Sixth national survey: adaptation of Ukrainians to the conditions of war. Sociological Group „Rating”. March 19, 2022. URL: https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/shestoy_obschenacionalnyy_opros_adaptaciya_ukraincev_k_usloviyam_voynny_19_marta_2022.html (date of appeal: 13.11.22)

The second hypothesis is that the value of education for Ukrainian students will increase due to the rise of their awareness concerning the impermanence of material things due to the war that they, unwillingly, became a part of. Obviously, the difficult financial situation will force students to focus primarily on earnings, and it will not always be the way to their self-realization, but modern Ukrainian youth is very eager for freedom and independence in various aspects of their lives, so they will try to find opportunities to realize their talents and abilities regardless of the situation.

Thus, the question of the prospects of value transformations of Ukrainian students, particularly in the way of individualization, remains open. Everyday reality is highly changeable and unpredictable and it makes it difficult for us to put forward any definite claims regarding the possible shift in the system of values among the Ukrainian youth. Nonetheless, we plan to confirm the abovestated hypotheses in our further studies.

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Value Transformations of Ukrainian Student Youth in the Educational Space

Summary

The value system of a person is considered to be a relatively stable phenomenon, but certain events and social conditions can influence it. As young people are mostly consumers of educational services it seems important to explore the educational values they possess in order to understand what they strive for and expect when getting higher education. The pandemic and war became significant factors that influenced, i.a. the educational practices of modern youth and, by extension, their system of values. In the present study, we decided to focus on one of the elements of the system of values, that is, the concept of individualization, which was studied in the context of university education.

Keywords: student youth, value orientations, value consciousness, value transformations, educational values, individualization.